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AUSTRIA'S APPEAL FOR CLEMENCY

Austrian protest to the Supreme Council against the terms of the St. Germain Treaty found no more moving expression than in the open letter sent to M. Clemenceau by the Austrian League of Nations' Union, referred to editorially elsewhere in these columns. It is interesting for its disclosure of the psychology of the defeated, the disposition to distribute rather than concentrate guilt, and the assertions made as to the overriding of the protests of a pacific minority of the people. There is this to be said in connection with it, that all recent disclosures of the Austrian Government's position after Emperor Charles came to the throne and Count Czernin to the premiership indicate that Germany had lost a loyal ally, and that if Austria had had her way the war would have terminated much sooner than it did. Nowhere was this fact better known than at Washington during the last years of the war. The text of the appeal for clemency follows:

SIR: In the note by which you communicated to the Austrian delegation in St. Germain the definitive conditions of peace the Allied and Associated Powers founded their decisions on the principle that the Austrian peoples have to share the responsibility for the war brought about by the former Austro-Hungarian Government; for "they had loudly acclaimed in Vienna the war on its outbreak," for "they had been the fervent partisans of the war from beginning to its end"; lastly, for "up to the final breakdown on the battlefield they had done nothing to dissociate themselves from the policy of their government and its allies." In face of this attitude "the Austrian peoples are, in conformity with the sacred rules of justice, bound to bear their full share of responsibility for a crime which brought such disaster to the world."

We deeply regret, like the spokesmen of all civilized nations, that a coincidence of unfortunate circumstances and forces over which we had no control made it possible to kindle the world's conflict which we saw with dismay raging for over four years over well-nigh all continents and countries. All the more it is our duty solemnly to protest against the assertion in no way proved that the Austrian peoples had been fervent adherents of the war during its whole term. The truth is that in Austria, as in all other countries, the holders of the civil and military power succeeded indeed for a short space of time to maintain the outward semblance of enthusiasm of large masses for the war. It was rather the feeling of resigned fulfillment of duty which animated the people. During the war the number of the partisans of peace steadily increased. But whatever could be done by the strictest censure of the press, by the gagging of Parliament, and by military dictature in order to suppress every true manifestation of popular feeling has been done for over four years on the largest scale. The passionate ill-will of the people which had slumbered in them during the war came to a violent eruption after the collapse of the military machine. It turned itself against the war and its authors. On the other hand, as long as the deadly struggle went on, every attempt to rouse numerous citizens to a public demonstration in favor of peace was doomed to a certain failure, because every country engaged in this dreadful war stigmatized such an attempt as an act of high treason fomented by the enemy and suppressed it without mercy.

Of all the peoples, however, the Austrian people seem to be least answerable for the deeds of their government. Our peoples were kept so long aloof from all political influence that it appears unjust to call to account even that small minority of them who acclaimed the outbreak of the war like the boisterous jingoes of other nations. In fact, the Austrian people were uninformed and without any political judgment. The organized propaganda of the press found no difficulty in creating hostile feelings by distorting truth, a travesty to which every belligerent Power unfortunately stooped. How successful must have been such tactics with our peoples, the most isolated in Central Europe and whose

conservative character had prevented their making themselves familiar with foreign countries and the true spirit of other nations.

The sufferings our innocent peoples had to sustain the last five years ought not to be increased by their having to atone for the sins of the principle of might, which prevailed hitherto in international relations.

The Austrian nation is now in greater need than ever of being led with good-will. An inculcation which hurts its sense of justice cannot but prolong indefinitely and intensify the feelings of aversion held by all nations against the victors. It is not by such a treatment of the defeated nations that the longed-for goal of a lasting peace may be attained.

The Austrian peoples had most warmly greeted the proclamation of Wilson's principles as the proof of an earnest purpose to establish a peaceful organization all over the world. But the fate to which these principles were doomed has cruelly disappointed public opinion in our country. Everybody in Austria longs at least for an outlook on a stable and lasting improvement in future international relations. As far as we are concerned, we shall unceasingly strive to win the hearty support of the people for the ideal of the League of Nations and exert ourselves to draw the different peoples nearer and finally reconcile them each with another.

We urgently beseech you, sir, not to make our task impossible, which has been already considerably hampered by the endless peace negotiations. The whole civilized world looks today on you. If fate has called you to judge our people they are entitled to a just judgment, based on the same standard as that to be applied to the guilt of all belligerent nations. But in this case you might be perhaps compelled to acquit all the nations and solely to condemn the imperialistic principle of might, unfortunately still adopted by the governments and daily creating new appalling dangers for the peace and civilization of the whole world.

INTERNATIONAL NOTES

Church and State are not to have that fixity and nominal unity of status in revolutionized and reconstructed Europe that preceded the war. For tactical reasons, both in Italy and France, there may be a rapprochement between the Vatican and the governments, but it will not register any substantial swing back toward the old régime. Neither in the new Germany nor the new Russia will there be that preferential status of the Lutheran Church on the one hand and the Orthodox Greek Church on the other which has made it so difficult for protesting bodies of Christians, whether Roman or Protestants, to get full liberty of thought and action. Even in Anglican England the secular mood of twentieth century democracy is beginning to assert its views, not only in labor circles long alienated from institutional religion, but also in circles where least suspected. Witness the recent seriously proposed plan of so weighty and conservative a journal as the *Statist*, that Great Britain meet and pay some of its crushing, huge debt by appropriating wealth existing in church property should adherents of the churches decline to acquire title to the same by payment of values based on contemporary appraisal. By decrees of the Supreme Council at Paris rights of religious minorities in several of the newly established nations have been cared for during treaty negotiations, conspicuously so in Poland and Roumania. In Czechoslovakia, the National Assembly's decision to separate church and State brought forth from Cardinal Skrbrensky, the Roman Catholic cardinal, a protest that led to a pronouncement by President Masaryk, part of which we quote. Said the great Czech statesman: